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This Administration, like previous ones, has stated repeatedly that the primary purpose of U.S. involvement in Vietnam is to support and promote "self-determination" by the Vietnamese people, their right and ability to "choose freely their own form of government, without outside interference." That statement has never been true in the past. It is not true today.

Obviously, "self-determination" has never been the effect of our involvement. Not one of the regimes we have supported, from the Bao Dai regime controlled by the French, through Ngo Dinh Diem to the military junta that rules today behind a constitutional facade, could have resulted from a process of choice that was truly free, or free of our own outside influence.

Not one has "represented" even a majority of the non-Communist Vietnamese it ruled, either in terms of composition, of political origins, or of responsiveness to values respecting social justice and issues of war and peace. Nor has our government, in its private estimates, ever imagined otherwise, of any of the regimes it supported with money, advice, and increasingly with our armed forces.

But the evident lack of self-determination in South Vietnam has not meant the failure of our policy. "Freedom of choice"

has not been the effect of that policy, but neither has it ever been our intent. On the contrary, in certain specific senses, it has always been our determined purpose, on which we have acted effectively, to prevent certain forms or outcomes of self-determination by important segments of Vietnamese society.

Our actual intent has been expressed both in our actions and inaction, words and silences, and in our internal policy statements. It is expressed most clearly in the internal statement of U.S. objectives in South Vietnam adopted as official Presidential policy in March, 1964: "The U.S. seeks an independent, non-Communist South Vietnam." (*italics added*) A further provision is that the South Vietnamese government, while it need not be formally allied to the U.S., must be "free to accept outside assistance."

Our officials, civilian and military, have typically interpreted this requirement for a "non-Communist" regime as inconsistent not only with acceptance, by us or by a regime we supported, of immediate Communist domination or even participation in a Saigon regime, but with an attitude of tolerance toward political activity by Communists or others that could lead to an increasing Communist role. We have supported only regimes whose policy has been totally to exclude the Communist element of Vietnamese society from any organized or even individual participation in political activity, and if possible to destroy it as an organized factor. In terms both of legitimacy and feasibility, this in itself has been a

project comparable to an attempt totally to exclude and destroy the Communist Parties in France or Italy. It has required, eventually, an enormous investment of foreign -- i.e., American -- money, arms, troops and lives.

But the effect of our intervention has by no means been limited to excluding this one minority element from representation. We have also thrown our weight against the emergence of governments that, in our opinion, while non-Communist and representative of a majority of the population, would not be sufficiently reliable in safeguarding our own dominant interest, preventing eventual Communist domination.

Our main support went, instead, to those most reliably "anti-Communist": as distinct from the mass of "non-Communists" that may indeed make up the majority of the population of South Vietnam today.

This has meant a grouping of the French- and U.S. -trained army, the Catholics, and especially the Northern refugees, the landlords and business. These, with their families and followers have constituted a minority scarcely larger than the Communists at their lowest. And they have shown themselves unable and unwilling to attract much broader support either from unorganized peasants or such relatively organized factions

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as the religious sects, the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai, or the unions, or the organized Buddhists: basically because of their unwillingness to share power with these elements (or with villagers, so far as political influence above the village level is concerned). That is why so great an American effort has been needed, in compensation, to achieve even a stalemate (which is another name for a "victory" that would not survive our withdrawal).

Most Vietnamese on both sides of the struggle see the hegemony of this particular minority grouping -- with its corruption and repression, its uncritical reliance on American firepower, and its prolongation of the war -- as the result of American policy and decisions. They are basically right. But has anything in this pattern changed lately?

Thieu's successful campaign from November 1969 to March 1970 to imprison the oppositionist Assemblyman Tran Ngoc Chau, in disregard of the 1967 Constitution, indicates strongly an open return to the familiar form of politics, described above and known to Vietnamese as "Diemism." If "self-determination" were truly our aim, Thieu's policies would be directly thwarting it. But do they, anyway, serve other U.S. interests?

Not our announced interest in a negotiated settlement. Thieu's policy shows a clear intent to monopolize governmental power in the hands of a narrow group which coincides with those least willing to see any reduction in U.S. presence or aid or indeed, an end of the war that would bring about such a reduction. This same grouping of forces will accept no compromise of a rigid anti-Communist policy that precludes concessions

required for negotiated settlement. U.S. policy, in turn, that predicates any agreement with North Vietnam or the NLF upon its acceptance by this Saigon regime, cannot lead to successful negotiations.

Does "Diemism without Diem" serve our policy of Vietnamization? Not if that means the aims of leaving Vietnam altogether, leaving it with a government worthy of U.S. and Vietnamese sacrifices, and one that can survive to fight or negotiate or coexist with Communists without us. Even with President Diem, a far more authoritative nationalist leader than Thieu, Diemism failed to achieve this, or to survive at all, even against non-Communist opposition. Thieu would be even less likely successfully to build an anti-Communist, authoritarian regime that would be strong and stable without either popular support or an American presence.

But the signs are that the Nixon Administration privately knows this quite well, and that Vietnamization means something else to it. Since the political component of that policy is clearly predicated on support of Thieu, including his repressive measures of the last six months, it appears to reflect the slogan: "There was nothing wrong with Diemism that 200,000 U.S. troops can't cure."

The recent U.S. adventure in Cambodia, ^{in Presidential style} imitating/Thieu's "loose construction" of his own Constitution, warns clearly that this Administration is no more ready to contemplate the "loss" of Indochina to Communism, during its term of office, than any of its predecessors: no less ready to incur

escalating risks and domestic dissent to avoid -- or more likely postpone -- such "humiliation" and "defeat." The rhetoric has changed, but the policy has not. It is one that condemns Vietnam to endless war, and Americans to endless participation in it, in support of a corrupt and unpopular military dictatorship.